

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, April 29, 1880, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell. L New York, April 29th, 1880. My sweet little wife:

I almost wish I had answered your telegram affirmatively “to come and be with me tomorrow” — I want you SO MUCH . You are a darling faithful good little wife to want to be with me when you suppose me to be suffering — but the fact of the matter is — that your sympathy is wasted — for I am having a very comfortable time of it in the dentists' hands (observe the plural possessive — two dentists are at work upon me). So let little baby have her supper in peace and don't leave her for me.

It is so desolate here now with all the family gone. Charlie — the last — has just left me for Philadelphia and I am alone. Although it is midnight I must write these few lines to you dear that you may know I love you and think of you. This is the first moment I have had to myself.

I was very much afraid that there would be a scene between your Papa and myself about the Trust-Property — and I was so oppressed by the feeling that I must speak to him on disagreeable subject-matter that I cast a gloom over everything and every body I am afraid and in addition gave myself a nervous headache from which I am only now beginning to emerge.

I found that a statement of the Trust-Property had been prepared in detail so far as the English Company had been concerned and your father had prepared a nice kind-hearted letter to you and me about the house and about the Trust-Property in the International. Your Papa is so kind and so forbearing with 2 me that I feel like a villain to find fault or question his arrangements. I fully believe that he has done everything with the best

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intentions in the world and my heart says "Leave it all to him — he knows better than you" —. But somehow or other my head refuses to think with the brains of another man and I feel that it is my duty to Elsie and to our little nameless one to think for myself and in their interests. I feel it my duty to try to understand the business matters of the Trust-Fund for their sakes — even if in so doing I offend your father and every one else. Looking at the statement made — from a business point of view so far as I can — I am profoundly dissatisfied with it. I was obliged to tell your father so and I asked him whether he would satisfy me so far as to turn over all the property he held personally in the Telephone business of the countries covered by the Deed of Trust — into the Trust Fund and submit the question to Mr. Storrow or some other suitable business men as to the amount that should be given to the Trust and as to the amount to be given to him personally. He was as usual — kind and forbearing with me — and agreed to all I asked. He wrote the enclosed letter to satisfy me. My darling little wife — I feel very unhappy about it all. On the one hand I feel inclined to let it all go — and let Mr. Hubbard manage everything as he pleases and on the other hand I feel it is my duty as your husband and the father of your babies to examine into the matter and be satisfied that your interests have been preserved. I often wish that I had not appointed a relation as Trustee as I am not free to criticise him. If it had only been some one else I could have then consulted Mr. Hubbard about the affairs of the Trust instead of being obliged to lean on my own imperfect knowledge alone in criticising. And yet when I come to think of it — it was right to appoint a relation — and the fault has been in myself. I have a voided the discussion with Mr. Hubbard of business matters connected with the Trust from fear of bringing about the very misunderstanding that now exists — and have naturally given your father the idea that I had no interest or concern in the matter at all. Your father's uncommunicative nature on the other hand has prevented him from volunteering information that I did not ask and thus a dead wall of silence has been growing up between us upon this subject — separating us more and more and arising as I can clearly see from preventable causes. My great mistake I now see was not in appointing Mr. Hubbard Trustee but in appointing him alone . I should have appointed a Board of Trustees for this would have necessitated

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discussion on every point as it arose and I would have then had a chance of knowing what was going on without having to tap your father for every drop of information. The only question is — is it too late to do this now?

I am afraid it would be difficult to take any action without creating fresh misunderstandings. Your father would feel as if I did not trust him were I to propose such a thing. And yet that is far from being my own feeling. I feel that if your father's action is restrained by the necessity of discussing a point with some one before he received power to carry it into effect — not only would it be a good thing for the Trust Property but we would get a 4 chance of knowing all about what was going to be done before it was done and thus be able to have a consultative voice.

Do you think your father would be hurt if I were to propose the following plan — providing for the continuance of Trustees during the term of the Trust. This point was neglected at the time the marriage settlement was made and no plan is provided for the succession of Trustees. This was a great mistake seeing that the Trust is to continue as long as either you or I live. The property being only released from Trust when we die when it will be divided among our children.

There should be more than one Trustee for if anything should happen to your father the new Trustee can know nothing about the Trust until he is called upon to take charge of it. Whereas if there are two Trustees it is extremely unlikely that anything should happen to both at the same time so that there would always be one left who knew about the Property and could explain to the successor of the other.

My darling it is painful to think or to hint of the possibility of death to one we love but it is my duty and your duty to look the future full in the face for the sake of our little ones.

The Trust lasts until after we both die. In the natural course of events then the control of the Trust must pass into other hands than your father's. What is to happen then? No provision is made in the marriage settlement. Or again — your father may lose patience

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with me and resign the Trust. This would be the greatest calamity that could happen for the Trust and for me. For there is no one so competent to take charge of the Trust as your father and the estrangement that would be between us would be worse than anything else.

The Trust was created for the benefit of any children we might have as well as a protection to you. It seems therefore eminently just that if two Trustees are appointed instead of one that one should be a member of your family and one a member of mine and that the first trustees should be the two grandparents.

I would therefore propose that your father and mine should be Trustees and that no disposition should be made of any part of the Trust property excepting under the written authority of both. Some business man should be employed at the expense of the Fund to keep the accounts of the Trust. Collect dividends etc and transact all the business of the Trust acting only under the written instruction of the Trustees.

In regard to the succession of Trustees. My father should at the time of his appointment as Trustee nominate some member of my family as his successor subject of course to change if he thinks fit. And your father should nominate a successor from your family.

The Trustees should give their services freely — charging only actual expenses to the Fund,

There! little wife — what do you think of that? Of course I would not broach the subject to your father or to mine until I have discussed it fully with you my darling. Good night.

Your own loving, Alec.